

November 15, 2004

Mr. Ron Fraass, Director  
National Air & Radiation Environmental Laboratory  
540 South Morris Avenue  
Montgomery, AL 36115-2601

Dear Mr. Fraass:

In an effort to learn more about the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) efforts for monitoring radioactive materials throughout the United States, Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) staff reviewed the EPA Environmental Radiation Ambient Monitoring System (ERAMS) website and found an abundance of good information. However, the NRC would like to express concern over one of the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) found at <http://www.epa.gov/narel/erams/faq.html>. Specifically, the question is as follows:

*What kind of nuclear threats exist in this day and time?*

Answer: "Aging nuclear reactors, accidents at nuclear plants and terrorist actions are some of the nuclear threats that exist in the world today. For example, due to the increase in the number of nuclear reactors operating throughout the world, the possibility of a nuclear accident is increasing."

The existing answer to this question is counter to the NRC position that the 103 commercial nuclear power plants in the United States are operated without undue risk to public health and safety and that the NRC's oversight of these operating reactors is comprehensive and effective. Nuclear power plants have robust designs based on the defense-in-depth philosophy and they also have sophisticated in-service inspection, testing, maintenance, and risk monitoring programs. Moreover, NRC oversight activities include inspection by resident inspectors and region-based inspectors in various technical areas and monitoring of performance indicators. You will find more information about security, threats, and nuclear facilities at the NRC website, [www.nrc.gov](http://www.nrc.gov).

We suggest that these words be substituted:

*What kind of nuclear threats exist in this day and time?*

Proposed answer: Radioactive materials are created or used in power generation, industrial, research, military, and medical facilities throughout the world. The use of these materials is regulated within the United States by agencies of Federal and State governments with the intent of minimizing the radiation exposure of the public. The intentional dispersal of radioactive materials by terrorists (e.g., "dirty bombs," attacks on nuclear facilities) is a threat in the post-9/11 world. In the event of a significant release, public officials may implement protective actions to reduce the radiation exposure of the public. Nuclear power reactors are operated under a defense-in-depth philosophy that includes robust designs, comprehensive NRC oversight which includes both resident inspectors and region-based inspection, an emergency preparedness program, and a sophisticated in-service inspection, testing, maintenance, and risk monitoring programs. An accidental release of a large quantity of radioactive material is possible, however, such an accident is unlikely because the requirements to which facilities are

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designed and operated are stringent. Radiation monitoring instruments incorporated into the design of fixed nuclear facilities and portable instruments used by emergency responders provide critical information to enable public officials to make these decisions. ERAMS supplements these monitoring capabilities.

Thank you very much for your attention to this matter. If you have questions, please contact Kathryn Brock of my staff at 301-415-2015.

Sincerely,

***/RA/***

Nader L. Mamish, Director  
Emergency Preparedness Directorate  
Division of Preparedness and Response  
Office of Nuclear Security and Incident Response

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